

# PSC 307: POLITICAL PARTIES

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Classes held in Talbert 115

## *Course Description*

Analyzes structures, functions, and roles of political parties in American government and politics, as well as internal dynamics and citizen identification with parties and politics.

## *Course Overview*

As one of the preeminent observers of American politics, the late, great E.E. Schattschneider, once opined, “modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties.” There are many ways in which this statement rings true, as the difficult task of aggregating the preferences of the electorate is made workable when voters are presented with a limited number of choices at the polls. For their part, though, the American electorate has often expressed a deep-seated ambivalence about political parties, and a number of major reform movements throughout American history have been geared toward lessening their impact on the political process. Yet the parties have exhibited a remarkable ability to survive and adapt to shifts in the political climate. In this class we will confront such changes and examine how parties—as organizations, in government, and in the electorate—serve to shape politics in the United States.

## *Readings*

There is one required text for the course (listed below). Supplemental readings will be posted in advance on UBLearn.

Book:

Schaffner, Brian F. 2012. *Politics, Parties, and Elections in America*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Readings from the textbook (and elsewhere) are to be completed before class.

## *Requirements and Grading*

<i>Requirements:</i>	Class Participation	10%
	Party Platform	15%
	Party-Building Activity	15%
	Mid-term	30%
	Final	30%

## EXPLANATION OF REQUIREMENTS

### *Attendance and Participation (10%)*

This course demands your active participation. Although I will often lecture to start class off, my sincere hope is that we can have some great discussions throughout the course together as a class. Note that 10 percent of your grade is at stake here, and perfect attendance is not adequate to earn it all. You must also ask questions, suggest answers, and continue the dialogue of this course. I expect you to come to class prepared to engage in a conversation. People who never say anything in class but attend perfectly will receive about 2/3 of all possible attendance points. I will take attendance via a sign-in sheet throughout the semester. I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences except in the most extreme cases (a severe illness, for instance). Everyone can have a bad day though, so I will give you two freebies—that's a full week of class. Any more than that, I am afraid, and you will start to lose points at a pretty rapid clip. Chronic tardiness will also be reflected in your participation grade.

### *Party Platform (15%)*

For this exercise you are to come up with a platform for either 1) your own political party or 2) a local variant of one of the established political parties in the United States. As political scientist Adam Brown observed, many local party organizations develop their own platforms in an attempt to distance themselves from the national party, often taking stands on particular issues that are explicitly opposed to what the national party organization trumpets as the party line. This is done in an effort to give local candidates running under the party's label a fighting chance in areas of the country where the national party brand does not play well with voters. For instance, Democrats in Utah often write pro-life planks into party platforms drawn up by the county party, while Republican Party organizations in the Northeast are frequently seen voicing support for abortion rights. No matter which route you choose, be sure to write up a memo explaining why you included the particular planks that you did. I want to know what the strategy was behind your platform. Pretend that I am the chairman of the local party organization. Construct this memo so as to convince me to get behind the structure and wording of your platform. Have fun with this assignment, but don't lose sight of what is at stake. If parties are organizations that are, at least in part, in service of candidates, you want to be clear as to why you developed your platform as you did. You should include three planks in your platform. These can be drawn from a national party's platform, but once again, you need to have a reason for their inclusion. This document is to be no more than two pages, double-spaced.

### *Party-Building Activity (15%)*

Political parties can function "in service" to the candidates running under their aegis. This often means running advertisements or creating other campaign communications in an effort to get their candidates elected. For instance, in 2008 the Republican Party helped John McCain close the advertising gap with Barack Obama by airing their own ads or so-called "coordinated" ads with the McCain campaign. Under the campaign spending restrictions in

place at the time, these ads were billed as “party-building” activities. The parties often undertake similar efforts on behalf of down-ballot candidates, sometimes even going so far as airing ads that distance their candidates from the party by casting them as “bipartisan” or “independent.” As paradoxical as it may seem, parties obviously have an incentive to get their candidates elected, as the party platform does little good if it has no chance at all of being implemented. Parties can also run negative ads for their candidates, which may insulate those running for office from “backlash” effects from voters. There are obvious drawbacks to such an approach, though, as they may injure the party in the long-term by hurting the brand and alienating strong supporters.

For this assignment I want you to make a political advertisement for a real candidate who is running (or is likely to run) in the upcoming 2016 elections. Be strategic about the ad’s content, keeping your eye trained on the electorate that your candidate will face as well as national political trends. What issues (if any) should you (as a party strategist) emphasize in the ad? Should they be issues of great importance to the party, or do you want to eschew any reference at all to the fact that your candidate is affiliated with a party? If you want to go the extra mile, you may actually make a 30-second spot ad (which I will air in class), or you can pull together a “creative,” which is a script for an ad complete with storyboards or descriptions of the images that are to appear in the commercial (I will give you an example of what this looks like).

With this ad you are to submit a strategy memo explaining why certain elements were included in your advertisement. Think about the following questions as you go about pulling together such a memo: As a party strategist, why did you choose this particular candidate? Are they in trouble electorally? Is the party especially popular in this particular electoral jurisdiction? Does the candidate need help winning this race, or can you afford to emphasize issues that are important to the party’s “brand name”? Is your candidate likely to lose anyways, in which case, were you able to throw “red meat” to the party faithful? Is your strategy optimal for the long-term health and survival of the party? In addition to your ad, I want a two-page (double-spaced) strategy memo describing why certain elements were featured in your party-sponsored advertisement. You may work in groups on the production of the ad, but I want each person in the group to write his or her own memo. These can be very similar in terms of their content, but I do want you to write your own paper.

*Midterm and Final* (60% total)

The final portion of your grade is tied to a pair of in-class exams. These will be primarily multiple choice affairs, but may contain some short answer or essay questions for good measure. I will have more details about these as they approach.

*Grading Policy*

Grades will be assigned in the following way:

A= 92-100	B-= 80-81	D+= 68-69
A-= 90-91	C+= 78-79	D= 60-67
B+= 88-89	C= 72-77	F= 0-59
B= 82-87	C-= 70-71	

However, I do reserve the right to adjust the scale if need be. This can only benefit you. That is to say that I will never institute a curve just for the sake of making the grades correspond to a normal distribution (a bell curve).

### *Course Objectives*

#### Substantive Goals

- 1) Understanding the broad sweep of American political history as it relates to political parties
- 2) Knowing the normative and empirical debates that occupy the attentions of party scholars
- 3) Placing political parties within the overall structure of American government and politics

### *Academic Integrity*

Please consult the university's statement on academic integrity here:  
<http://undergrad-catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/course/integrity.shtml>

Expect severe sanctions if you commit an act of academic dishonesty.

### *Accommodations*

“If you require classroom or testing accommodations due to a disability, please contact Accessibility Resources, located at 25 Capen Hall. AR can be reached by phone at (716) 645-2608 or by email at [stu-accessibility@buffalo.edu](mailto:stu-accessibility@buffalo.edu). Please inform me as soon as possible about your needs so that we can coordinate your accommodations.”

### *Some More Ground Rules*

Technology is great. In spite of the fact that my iPod is now a decade old, I actually love technology. However, technology in the classroom can also be distracting. In my experience laptops and other devices that can, in theory, be used to promote learning are more often used to surf the internet and cruise Facebook. Until they become a problem you are free to use laptops to take notes and pursue other class-related activities (e.g., the occasional Google search for course-relevant information). Much of the recent research on note-taking and information retention suggests that you will get far more out of class by taking notes on paper using a pen or pencil. I THEREFORE STRONGLY ENCOURAGE YOU TO PUT THE LAPTOP AWAY DURING CLASS. Also, to the best of my knowledge, phones and iPods serve very little pedagogical purpose in a political science course. As such, I should not see or hear either such device in class. I'm not going to walk around the classroom confiscating such things (this isn't high school), but I will be liberal with my deductions from your grade if I see them in use during class.

### *Due Dates and Excuses*

“I'm really busy” is not an acceptable excuse in this course. If you see a conflict coming, do plan for it in advance. Extensions are granted at my discretion, and on a case-by-case basis. Technology-related excuses are not acceptable. Disk space is cheap these days. Get a back up hard drive or a USB flash drive (or three) and never have a problem again.

## *Late Assignment Policy*

Unless I have granted you an extension, a five percentage point penalty will be assessed for EACH DAY (yes, even weekends and holidays) that an assignment is late. For instance, if your paper is late three days, the maximum score that you can receive for the assignment is an 85. A perfect paper suddenly becomes a mid-range B if it is late by a few days. After the deadline for an assignment has passed it is a day late, so please don't think that you can convince me to assess a penalty that is less than five percentage points.

## *A Final Caveat*

This is a provisional battle plan for this course. There may be changes in the content or coverage of the material as the course unfolds. I will try to inform you of any such changes as far in advance as I can.

Week	Topic	Readings
1/26	Introduction and Introductions/ Definitional Issues: What is a Party?	T: None Th: Schaffner Ch. 1; Cohen et al. pp. 29-40
2/2	Why Parties?/The Historical Development of the Parties/Electoral Realignments and Party Systems	T: Schaffner pp. 17-33; pp. 51-57 Th: Mayhew Ch. 2 and Ch. 3
2/9	Minor Parties and Two-Party Dominance in the U.S.	T: Schaffner pp. 33-47; Dewey Ch. 1 Th: Williamson et al.; Rosenstone et al. pp. 3-12 F: <b>Party Platform Due</b>
2/16	Functional or Responsible Parties?	T: Schaffner pp. 57-72; APSA, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System" Th: Rae
2/23	Party Organizations	T: Schaffner Ch. 4 Th: Pomper Ch. 5; Green and Herrnson
3/2	Party Reform and Primaries	T: Schaffner Ch. 5 Th: Ansolabehere et al.
3/9	Presidential Nominating Politics: Does the Party Decide?	T: Schaffner Ch. 6; Meinke et al. Th: <b>Mid-Term Exam</b>
3/16	Spring Break (Woot!)	
3/23	Parties in the Electorate	T: Schaffner Ch. 7 Th: Green et al. Ch. 2; Philpot Ch. 1
3/30	Parties in Service to Candidates (Parties <i>in</i> Elections)	T: Schaffner Ch. 8; <i>The Architect</i> (documentary) Th: Kolodny and Logan
4/6	Parties in Government	T: Cox and McCubbins Ch. 2 Th: Schaffner Ch. 9 F: <b>Party-Building Activity Due</b>
4/13	Parties and Ideology	T: Noel Ch. 2 Th: No class (MPSA)
4/20	Party Decline and Resurgence:	T: Coleman pp. 14-17; Pomper (1990)

	What Makes a Party Strong?	Th: Fiorina
4/27	Party Polarization/Unified versus Divided Government	T: Fiorina et al Ch. 1 and Ch. 2; Th: Mayhew; Brownstein Ch. 1;
5/4	Looking Forward	T: Schaffner Ch. 10 Th: TBA
5/11	FINAL EXAM	Th (5/14): 11:45PM-2:45PM